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THE ORGANIZATION OF FORMER RESIDENTS OF MANYEVITZ AND ITS SURROUNDING TOWNS AND VILLAGES THOSE LIVING IN ISRAEL AND IN THE DIASPORA

By Yehuda Merin

Israel, 2001

This organization was established in Israel in the 1950's. There were already a small number of families who had immigrated before World War II. It is important to mention that these few expressed great interest in maintaining contact with those who arrived immediately after the war. This latter group was made up of single people - partisans who had taken an active part in the partisans' operations in the Disrict of Wolyn and of families that had lived in the family camps in the forest under the protection of the partisans.

In the late 1940's and early 1950's, the "community" of families that had come from Manyevitz numbered approximately 100, and they soon founded the organization. The fact is that the Jewish population in Manyevitz in 1941 was over 3,000, most of whom had not been born there, but had come from many different places in the Russian empire, beginning with Kiev, Moscow, Petrograd, Lublin and, of course, from the surrounding towns and villages. It is therefore incorrect to assume that this community had existed for hundreds of years as had other towns in Poland. However, the organization functioned reasonably well. Monies were collected both in Israel and abroad, nd an interest-free fund was set up which, indeed, did distribute monies, but since the loans were not returned, the fund was thenceforth considered as aid to the needy.

In the 1950's, the eldest member of the organization, Abraham Puchtik, of blessed memory, purchased a burial plot in the "Keepers of the Sabbath" cemetery in Bnei Brak, where dust and ashes from the mass graves in Manyevitz and pieces of parchment from a rescued Torah scroll had been brought to Israel by our member, Ze'ev Raveh (Vove Verba).

For over 50 years, we have held memorial services in remembrance of our martyrs who were murdered in Manyevitz and its surroundings on Elul 23 (September, 1941 and September, 1942). It is interesting to note that the grave of the "Hazon Ish," of blessed memory, is near our monument. (It is believed that he had asked to be buried near this monument to Manyevitz's martyrs.)

In the 1990's, when the Ukrainian government passed a law permitting monuments to be raised on the sites where our dear ones had been killed, we were among the first to do so. The unveiling of our monument took place in Manyevitz in August, 1991. Present were approximately 20 people from Israel, from Wolyn and from different places in Russia - all originally from Manyevitz. The monument is well-tended by a local Ukrainian and a Polish woman. On the memorial day, candles are lit and wreaths of flowers are laid. At last year's ceremony, a local Catholic priest said a prayer for the memory of the holy ones. We are planning to visit the monument this coming summer, and we pray that we will be able to do so.

We commissioned the sculptor Joseph Vishnia to create a statue memorializing the martyrs and fighters from Manyevitz and its surroundings. Dedicated in 1993 in Holon, it depicts both the sense of loss and the fighting spirit of resistance in the young people of the towns. Engraved on the statue are the following words: "In Memory of the Martyrs of Manyevitz and its Surroundings, September, 1941 and September, 1942." The towns were destroyed, but the youths had organized praiseworthy partisan units that bravely fought the Nazi enemy and took revenge on the murderers, 1941 - 1945.

High school and university students are drawn to the statue. A stipend was granted on December 20, 1998, by our organization for a thesis to be written on the subject of the statue and its meaning.

Near the Wolyn Center in Givatayim we raised another monument in1999 dedicated to the partisans and soldiers from the Disrict of Wolyn.

Manyevitz stands at the head with the number of its fighters - 90, and its name is engraved on a stone in "The Valley of the Destroyed Communities" at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

Our largest and complicated project has been the collection of personal testimonies and memoirs of partisans and people who had lived in the family camps in the forest. This collection was forwarded to the Yad Vashem, and on its basis 2 books have been printed: 1) "As Pines They Grew", which contains the testimonies of fighters from Manyevitz, Povursk and Horodok. 2) "A Town in the Forest", a university masters thesis based on research of the family camps in the forest.

We are currently planning to publish an album combining the memoirs and history of Manyevitz and its surroundings including pictures taken before, during and after the Holocaust. It is our sincere hope that through our continued efforts, and with the help of our 2nd and 3rd generations, the legacy of the Jews of Wolyn will be preserved.

In conclusion, I wish to point out that our organization is closely linked to the Association of Former Residents of the District of Wolyn, is represented on its executive body and takes part in all the Association's activities.